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ABSTRACT

Community work-education councils are supplying "grass roots" citizen involvement in policymaking on transitional services for youth moving from school to work. Since 1977, almost 1,000 people in thirty-three communities have participated in local work-education councils affiliated with the national Work-Education Consortium. On the average, the councils consist of twenty-three members representing community leaders and program directors. The success of such collaborative efforts depends on the presence of the following fundamentals: leadership, representation, responsibility, understanding, resources, and independence to assess their own needs, priorities, ability to initiate actions, and proper timing for changes. Unlike the needs and priorities of federal and state programs which are mandated, those of local councils are selected to suit their specific situations, and vary from emphasis on data collection (to aid in developing local awareness and understanding of youth transition issues) to the provision of accurate and up-to-date career information for youth. Eight of the thirty-three councils represent rural areas and, with the assistance of the National Manpower Institute, have formulated a charter of ten major propositions to improve rural youth transition. As communities, in general, build on this charter and the other fundamentals of collaboration, they will achieve greater influence in shaping education-and-work policy for youth transition. (ELG)

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TOWARDS WORK-EDUCATION COLLABORATION: REVITALIZING AN AMERICAN TRADITION

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TOWARDS WORK-EDUCATION COLLABORATION: REVITALIZING AN AMERICAN TRADITION

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The fundamentals of collaborative efforts are so straightforward, and so all-American in their values that we should be puzzled, concerned, amused, as well as pleased, that the concept of community collaboration today is playing such a vigorous role in the theater of public policy on youth transition from school to work.

We still are, as Arthur Shlesinger, the elder, once described, "a nation of joiners," given to forming committees and clubs and associations to deal with every minor and major issue. We should be amused that so much discussion about innovation has been attached to the presumably simple mechanism of bringing people together to talk about the patterns of behavior of young people (and adults) as they move from education to work to education to leisure to work and so on in our contemporary (and future) society.

Allowing for the increased influence of national policy-making on all aspects of our lives since the Great Depression, we might well be concerned that federal and state legislation and programs are seen so frequently as the preferred mechaniam today for promoting greater citizen involvement in human services (including education) policy-making and program development. Allowing for the complexity and multiplicity of issues tied to the concept of youth transition from education to work, we might well be puzzled by the need to legislate shared decision making in the youth transition area at the same time that grass roots citizens involvement

movements have grown so rapidly and effectively in the environmental, energy conservation, consumer rights, abortion (pro- and anti-), and political access areas. It was legislative frustration, not a mandate from voters, which led to the various education advisory councils and the "marriage" of CETA-education agency planning under the Youth Employment Training Programs part of the recent Youth Employment Demonstrations Project Act (YEDPA) of 1977.

Community work-education councils are one non-legislated approach to involving leaders of community institutions -- particularly private sector employers, labor and youth service institutions -- in the collaborative analysis, formulation and implementation of improved youth transition services.

Since early 1977, almost one thousand people in 33 communities and states around the nation have been experiencing the practice of collaboration through local work-education councils affiliated with the national Work-Education Consortium. To assure that they can have essential staff support, participating councils have received "seed money" from the U.S. Department of Labor supplemented from the start by local funding and substantial local in-kind contributions of volunteer effort, office space and materials. Technical assistance, information exchange services, and Consortium coordination are provided by the National Manpower Institute, a private non-profit organization.

In the process, we are learning more about collaboration: what are its typical behaviors, how to make it happen locally, how to relate local collaborative activities to those in other communities, how to introduce the lessons of local collaboration into state and national policy discussions.

These councils range in size from 11 to 31 members, averaging about 23. Their memberships bring together community leaders (mayors, school superintendents and board members, union local presidents and district officials, corporate presidents and vice-presidents, board members of leading voluntary service organizations, college presidents, leading lawyers, doctors) and representative program directors (e.g., CETA prime sponsor administrators: directors of career, vocational, community and continuing education programs; directors of neighborhood groups and service organizations; key staff of employment security offices; corporate officers).

What we are learning about the fundamentals of collaboration is straightforward. The basic requirements are:

o Leadership: The people in a community who have the authority to make local institutions move need to be involved either directly or through their agents.

o Representation: Since school-work issues and solutions cross so many institutional boundaries it is important to involve leadership elements of all the affected sectors including education (secondary and post-secondary), commerce (business and industry), organized labor, youth service agencies, government, and youth itself. Representation strategies differ by community conditions; few communities know how to involve youth effectively.

o Responsibility: Leaders have to share (or be taught to share) responsibility for the past, present and future successes and failures not simply of their own institutions but of the community's overall efforts to deal with youth transition. Collaboration requires an active, not a merely advisory, posture.

o Understanding: Not easily determined, this quality implies that a few key leaders perceive the relationships between youth transition issues and economic development issues, educational quality issues, social services issues and community development issues.

o Resources: The local poker club can not play without chips; collaboration means little unless the key participants can be convinced to risk some of "their" chips/turf/power for the chance of some meaningful benefits. When understanding and resources get together, the terms "innovation" and "clout" soon appear. But this use of the term "resources" should not be confused with a supposed need for large grants or contracts. Big budgets are not needed to make collaboration work. Applying existing resources--staff as well as dollars--to collaborative activities usually requires new effort more than new money.

The knitting of these strands into a whole fabric can be difficult and rewarding. A sense of and sensitivity to political relationships is essential, although we are not talking about politics per se. Technical knowledge is far less important than the ability to identify and recruit technical expertise at the appropriate times. One key factor in the effectiveness of councils is the full-time effort of the paid "secretariat," a council director and clerical assistant at a minimum.

When it happens in the real world, with needs and priorities selected by local councils rather than by mandated Federal or state government programs, collaboration takes many forms. The examples that follow are all taken from the 33 communities and states participating in the national Work-Education Consortium.*

*More information regarding the Consortium may be obtained from the National Manpower Institute, Center for Education and Work, Suite 301, 1211 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Many councils have discovered the importance of data collection to the development of local awareness and understanding of youth transition issues:

- Among the projects of the rural Bethel (Maine) Area Community Education Work Council are three survey and research projects designed collaboratively and likely to lead to a variety of follow-up collaborative activities:

  -- Surveying the transition needs of youth. With assistance from the sociology department of the University of Maine at Farmington, the Telstar Student Council and Council staff designed a survey instrument to determine how young people perceive transition problems and assistance. With preparation in survey techniques, the students administered the survey to all students in grades 9-12. Data were computerized and analyzed at the university with final reports received in July. The survey, in addition to involving students directly in community discussions of their own affairs, confirmed, clarified or challenged many of the suppositions which supported those initial discussions.

  -- Surveying present and future demand for labor in the Bethel area. In a rural area, this type of information is almost nonexistent, yet is as necessary there as in more populous areas as a basis for informed discussion of realities. A survey was designed by the Council and endorsed by the Chamber of Commerce. The Council identified and hired a retired businessperson to conduct the survey among local employers. As with the youth survey, the data will be used in curriculum planning, career counseling strategies and career education activities generally.

  -- In a third research effort, the Council arranged for two Economic Development Interns to develop basic data profiles of the six communities in the Bethel area. The interns were supervised by the Androscoggin Valley Regional Planning Commission and made their final report in mid-July. Their work forms a starting point for comprehensive economic development planning. It also broadens the perspective of the labor demand survey to include an awareness of future occupational growth and career potential.

- Individual and industry leaders in the energy field and representatives of business and labor in the Seattle, Washington area participated along with leaders of local youth-serving organizations and the public in a two-day conference held to explore possible new business and job opportunities from emerging energy conservation programs and energy-related technological areas. The conference also was used to focus on school-to-work transition and youth employment issues in general and to generate community interest in and commitment to the Puget Sound Work-Education Council.

- In conjunction with the Education-Work Council of Enfield, Connecticut, the Chambers of Commerce of Hartford, Connecticut and Springfield, Massachusetts cosponsored a regional seminar on human resources planning and allocation. The seminar involved representatives of the business, industry, labor, education, and government sectors of the Hartford-Springfield region. It was designed to raise levels of awareness regarding area economic issues; to encourage human resource planning in business and industry; to develop trust among business, industry, and local planners in the area of human resource needs forecasting; and to identify various approaches to human resource planning.

- The Education and Work Council of Erie City and County, Pennsylvania is of some interest because data collection and processing--surveys, inventories, program profiles--have been so central to the Council's self-definition as an information broker and catalyst. The Council consciously avoids direct responsibility for client services delivery projects, concentrating staff and committee energies on identifying, defining, researching, describing and analyzing relevant issues and options. Council members use this support structure to then identify key actors in the community and encourage them to be responsible for program developments. Studies completed include:

  -- Profiles of Model School-to-Work Efforts

  -- Study of Local Manpower Needs Surveying

  -- Inventory of Local Vocational Education Programs

  -- Feasibility Report on Follow-ups of Recent High School Graduates.

  In all cases these studies were identified as necessary for gaining insight into resources and institutional relationships and practices at the local level.

In other instances, frequently as a consequence of initial surveys and fact-finding activities, local councils have focused attention and action on providing more accurate, timely career information to young people:

- In the mixed industrial/agricultural area around East Peoria, Illinois, the Tri-County Industry-Education-Labor Council has employed YETP funds from two CETA prime sponsors (Peoria Consortium and Tazewell County) to survey several hundred area employers. The survey is a key element in the development of a localized occupational file for a

CIVIS-derived computerized career information program. The survey itself greatly extended the Council's contacts with area employers, who, with few exceptions, have responded enthusiastically to personalized requests for data. The computer program is maintained by Illinois Central College's Career Guidance Center (funded by the Illinois Office of Education). The Council and ICC have initiated extensive in-service workshops for teachers and guidance counselors in the tri-county area. Thus, this survey is an integral component of the ongoing improvement of career information programs in the area.

o The Mid-Michigan Community Action Council (MMCAC) of rural Gratiot County, Michigan, for example, has operated a number of career information and exploration projects for several years. Building upon an active program of classroom speakers, career days, and job shadowing activities which draw annually on more than 600 volunteers in central, rural Michigan, the Council is currently involved in several experimental projects:

-- Project TOES (Temporary Odd-Job Employment Service) was begun in January, 1978, as an experimental general employment referral program for young people, ages 14-19, not eligible for CETA youth programs. This program, deemed expecially risky because of the depressed economic climate in Gratiot County, has successfully established solid working relationships with the Michigan Employment Security Commission Office. The project is staffed by a CETA Title VI employee of the Council who works on-site at the MESC office and brokers referrals and information between local schools, MESC, and employers. The Council initiated contacts with the local 4-H organization to link the TOES project with skill training for youths seeking part-time work.

-- Volunteer Media Bank Videotaping: During mid-1978, staff of MMCAC began taping interviews with local workers such as a truck driver, farmer, lawyer, and a doctor. Twelve of these videotapes have now been produced. They are field tested for classroom impact with middle-school and high-school teachers. Then, in cooperation with the Michigan Employment Security Commission, the videotapes are aired over local cable television along with information on current job openings, employment counseling segments and live interviews. The tape is housed in the Regional Educational Media Center where it is available for use by teachers in a three-county area. The media bank conserves the energy of popular career speakers while making their unique presentations available as one teaching option.

-- Job Fair Bus: Two years of work went into the development of this idea to make career exploration materials accessible to all K-8 students in Gratiot County. The FAIR Bus has mobile displays, slide-tape

shows, games, texts, and related curricular activities. Schools "book" the bus at no cost and receive in-service training from Council staff. One school system has agreed to provide labor maintenance service for the bus, while the Council carries materials costs.

-- The annual "Career Days" is a unique County-wide venture when, for two days, almost 800 students shadow volunteer adult workers. The logistical arrangements are complex with so many sites in use and with most volunteers providing transportation for students. Both schools and employers have emphasized their preference for the two-day "event" rather than spreading the visits over a whole year in small numbers. The special event aspect also gives greater public visibility and importance to the concepts of career exploration. Students and volunteers clearly prefer personal shadowing to the alternative large group, in-school career fair concept.

o In Oakland, California, the Oakland Community Careers Council has developed a clearinghouse of information on all kinds of work experience, job placement, career counseling and related resources. The Council conducted the first comprehensive survey in the Oakland area of organizations providing education-work services for young people. To everyone's amazement, several hundred such organized programs existed. The Council will not duplicate any of these programs, Rather, the survey and the Clearinghouse developed out of the survey are the first steps toward systematic information sharing and planning among these groups. In the process, the Council staff are also acting as a referral service for inquiries from young people in Oakland.

o In Wayne County, Michigan, the Work-Education Council of Southeastern Michigan played the central organizing, catalytic role in bringing the Michigan Occupational Information System (a state developed computerized program) into Wayne County. Because of the Council, prime sponsors, school districts, libraries, colleges, and youth service agencies have all worked together--many for the first time.

-- That same council has organized career change workshops for pink-slipped teachers, has established teacher-in-industry in-service training programs, has involved business persons and labor persons in school curriculum development, and brought three colleges together with the Council and Wayne County Office of Manpower to develop a winning Youthwork proposal designed to provide intensive career counseling and work experience for in-school youth.

Closer working relationships between education, business, government, labor and service agencies are blossoming, at least tentatively, in many

places. Federal legislation, including the Education Amendments of 1976 and 1978, the Career Education Incentive Act of 1977, and many parts of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), has stimulated interest. Yet the legislation is itself an outgrowth of the broader recognition that governmental mandates and funds of themselves cannot make programs work at the local level.

Understanding how to involve local leadership in collaborative, institution-changing initiatives is growing slowly. The benefits to young people and their communities of these efforts are still comparatively modest and only partially recognized. In essence, we are only beginning to find ways to eliminate the costly, harmful effects of institutional isolation and turfdom which have burdened schools, government programs, employers, labor unions and the concerned public in their dealings with each other.

In this regard it has been particularly interesting to see many of the councils participating in the Work-Education Consortium focus their initial attention on problems and issues related to career guidance. The "information society" has become a truism for the United States. Yet so much of the knowledge essential to career decisions and opportunities is outside the daily experience and observation of young people. Much of what councils have been doing involves bringing the community as a whole within the experience of young people. The network of community leaders established through the mechanism of a collaborative council can be extended to become an enriched network of interactions between young people and adults generally.

As these networks become more common and accepted, meaningful institutional accommodations ought to follow. The fears and myths which too often confuse youth-adult, public-private, school-work relationships should diminish over time. More crucially, we will be learning how to design and manage local programs which discover the educational content of the entire community, engage the economic and social interests of each community, and recognize that the current education-work issues affecting youth transition simply anticipate the shape of education-work-training issues affecting us all.

Some of the lessons learned have reinforced earlier working assumptions that different models of local collaborative councils would be appropriate for different types of communities. Clearly, differences in relative youth unemployment or the visibility of school vandalism would influence any community's sense of crisis. But deeper, more stable issues are also involved. The histories and cultures of some communities and regions create differences in the strategies one uses to build a formal council, or to initiate discussions which might lead to council formation. Political and economic power is more centralized in some communities, while relatively diffuse in others. Urban areas can be more experienced than rural areas in quick responses to problems and opportunities. But the testing period for those responses in urban areas may be brief and vulnerable to the drain of many competing interests.

Among the 33 councils of the national Work-Education Consortium, eight representing rural areas worked with the National Manpower Institute to articulate a rural perspective on local collaboration in the area of youth

transition. The result, A Charter for Improved Rural Youth Transition,* identified ten "propositions," each with a series of possible action initiatives appropriate in rural communities. Reporting the propositions here emphasizes the breadth of interest and commitments to long-term results which ought to characterize work-education councils.

The councils contributing to the development of the Charter were:

- Bethel Area Community Education-Work Council, Bethel, Maine
- Community Education-Work Council, Tullahoma, Tennessee
- Community Education-Work Council of Southeast Nebraska, Lincoln Nebraska
- Martin County Education-Employment Council, Williamston, North Carolina
- Mid-Michigan Community Action Council, Alma, Michigan
- Northwest Vermont Community Education-Work Council, St. Albans, Vermont
- Sioux Falls Area Education-Work Council, Sioux Falls, South Dakota
- Tri-County Industry-Education-Labor Council, East Peoria, Illinois

The propositions they and the National Manpower Institute's Center for Education and Work developed are:

- The expansion of education and training opportunities must be balanced by and integrated with the development of appropriate employment opportunities.
- Rural work-education councils can serve to generate initiatives that benefit and involve a wide cross section of the community, enhance the community's general quality of life, and reflect its prevailing values.
- Rural work-education councils need to increase both public and institutional awareness of school-to-work transition issues. Awareness-building activities should be based on an affirmation of community pride and be a corollary to the general reawakened interest in rural America.

*The Charter is also available from the National Manpower Institute on a cost basis of $2.50.

- Rural collaboration must seek to foster the consolidation of local, sectional, and national interests to meet specialized youth transition needs.

- Given the dispersal of population, the lack of public transportation, and the isolation of rural people and institutions, work-education councils need to be provided with adequate supportive services to carry out their work.

- National data do not adequately reflect the dimensions of rural living. An important function of rural education-work councils can be to specify the key indicators that more fully reflect the qualities of rural life. Rural work-education councils should collect, develop, and disseminate more relevant, accurate, and usable data regarding local rural communities.

- State, regional, and federal resources available to rural areas for the enhancement of education-to-work transitions are generally inadequate. Work-education councils need to generate efforts to stimulate greater resources for rural populations.

- Rural education-work councils should work cooperatively with other groups that represent rural interests to ensure that federal, state, and local linkages are sufficiently strong to provide equal opportunities for rural youth.

- Education-work councils can serve to expand and diversify educational, cultural, employment, and service opportunities for youth in their communities.

- Rural communities need to develop collaborative models that respond to and grow out of <u>local</u> styles, customs, and modes of organization.

Obviously, the propositions also stress the insight that serious, long-term improvements in the youth transition area must be perceived in broad economic and political terms as well as in terms of education and training. Labor demand as well as supply, cultural norms as well as economic motivations, potential political power as well as assessments of current problems, strengths as well as weaknesses should become a part of the thinking of a local collaborative council. Equally obvious, no one institution--education (secondary or post-secondary), business (large or

small), labor (organized or not), government (local, state or national), or voluntary agencies--has the ability to steer its way through all these issues.

But if the propositions are large ones, the fact remains that all action needs a starting point. These starting points may be small or large, depending on the particular community, the strength of a particular council, and the strategies used to develop credibility and trust for a council within its community base. This takes us full circle back to the examples of early collaborative actions taken by a number of councils. Each council relied on its own assessment of:

- community needs,
- priorities among those needs,
- council ability to initiate actions and stimulate other, existing organizations to initiate actions, and
- sense of timing about when, where, how and with whom to intervene in the routine life of their community.

In effect, to the five fundamentals of collaboration listed earlier should be added a sixth: <u>independence</u>. At the heart of the shared personal and institutional responsibility which members of successful councils must have is their sense of ownership of an idea, the idea of collaboration. That sense of ownership of an idea comes from the experience of practicing the idea with others. The practice of collaboration requires independence of external authority, meaning the freedom of a group to set its own purposes, strategies and methods.

Assuming these fundamentals of collaboration are realized, communities and youth themselves will constitute a heavier, more influential weight in the balance of nation-wide forces shaping education and work policies.